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Hooked!: Buddhist Writings on Greed, Desire, and the Urge to Consume, and: Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy (review)

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der, is authentically Buddhist, but concern with gender inequities is not authentically Buddhist.

King often notes that the main goal of Engaged Buddhism is to alleviate suffering. Certainly gender inequities cause as much suffering as economic and political injustice or violence. Gender inequities demonstrate a lack of human rights. Every concern and issue with which Engaged Buddhists deal is laced through with gender implications and gender inequities. Yet one would never know that from King's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Engaged Buddhism. Why is it that those so concerned with peace, nonviolence, human rights, and reconciliation so often forget that gender inequities compound and intensify every other social problem and that these problems cannot be solved without direct attention to gender equity. Surely we Engaged Buddhists and critics of Engaged Buddhism can do better!

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HOOKED! BUDDHIST WRITINGS ON GREED, DESIRE, AND THE URGE TO CONSUME. *Edited by Stephanie Kaza*. Boston: Shambhala, 2005. 271 pp.

SUBVERTING GREED: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY. *Edited by Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002. 193 pp.

The Buddha's second noble truth diagnoses the cause of suffering as desire, understood as a mental state of greed or clinging attachment that in turn leads to grasping. The mind that wants to find lasting satisfaction by grasping at objects of desire, the Buddha said, is doomed to dissatisfaction because the very nature of conditioned existence frustrates permanent pleasure. The monkey-mind keeps clinging desperately to the banana in the cage even as that clinging itself traps the hand that grasps. To let go, to escape suffering through an insight into the structural nature of the cage, the fruit, and the grasping hand, seems beyond the monkey's abilities until, chastened by the seemingly endless lack of satisfaction and wishing to emerge into a state of freedom, the monkey enters the path and trains his mind to recognize the true causes of his frustration.

The teachings of the Buddha have been understood, for the past 2,500 years, as a therapy of desire. The analysis of suffering and its causes in the confused and clinging minds of ordinary sentient beings, and the prescription of a path of training to uproot those causes and thereby free the mind from suffering, have been presented as a perennial psychospiritual system of training responding to

the afflicted condition of every sentient being's mind regardless of culture, language, or economic system. But what happens, asks Santikaro, the American meditation teacher and disciple of Achaan Buddhadasa, in his essay in *Hooked!*, when this psychological inquiry is taking place in a social context marked by the deliberate and systematic exacerbation of desire, as in the contemporary period of consumerist capitalism? This question might be taken as a kind of koan to be read between the lines in all of the essays in this compelling, darkly humorous, and inspiring book: is liberation possible under capitalism? Even the Buddha's teachings can be commodified, Thubten Chodron points out in her essay, with examples ranging from the advertising hype on posters for the highest yoga tantra initiations by visiting Tibetan lamas to the high prices charged at many retreat centers and the commercial mindsets of Buddhist students wanting the biggest bang for their buck when they come to teachings or retreats. Even socially engaged Buddhist activists surf the web looking for bargains between news flashes on the latest imperial wars, as Diana Winston ruefully and comically recounts in her piece, "You Are What You Download." It seems that we are in danger of becoming a population of "hungry ghosts," the mythical beings of Buddhist cosmology whose tiny mouths cannot possibly consume enough food and drink to slake the voracious hungers and thirsts of their enormous bellies.

The essays in *Hooked!* range widely across themes and vary greatly in styles. The text moves from the personal memoir of Winston to the meditation teachings of Pema Chodron, the philosophical inquiries into time of David Loy, descriptions of social change movements in Thailand by Pracha Hutuanuwatr and Jane Rasbash, green power in contemporary Japan, essays on generosity in Zen monastic training and gift-based economies, young Buddhists' shopping habits, and much more. But all of the authors seem to agree with the recognition that, under capitalism, the problem of desire, greed, and attachment is exponentially more acute than in traditional societies, dwelling as we do in an environment that is antithetical to the very idea of a therapy for desire's overcoming. The essayists also seem to agree that hope is not vain, that it is in fact still possible to follow the path of the Buddha under capitalism, but that to be effective the practice of the path needs to take seriously and fully acknowledge the effects, intrapsychically as well as socially, of the capitalist economic system. We are constructed as consumerist selves by capitalism, the innate tendencies of the conditioned mind to be monkeys clinging to caged bananas are increased by the culture's constantly advertised admonition to want and to satisfy wanting through consumption. Therefore, the meditative tracing of dissatisfaction to its causes must now include sociocultural critiques of the economic world and its presence within our minds. Greed is perennial, but, says Santikaro, the causes and conditions of our specific forms of inflamed greed are historically contextual, having to do with the transition from archaic gift-economies through various intermediate forms to an economy based on private profit, which has now become globally dominant.

Stephanie Kaza, Rita Gross, and others connect this economic system to ecological despoliation and write with the assumption that without a radical transi-

tion to a less greedy, more generous, and therefore sustainable economy in the near future, any question of the nature and role of Buddhist practice will become moot, at least on this planet. The political and ethical ramifications of the critique of consumerist desire are present in most of the essays in *Hooked!*, but the focus of the volume is on the experience of practitioners in the affluent countries. The essay on Thailand is an exception to this. Judith Simmer-Brown suggests that a kind of “Buddhist liberation theology” might be necessary as an ideological framework for what will necessarily be a prolonged struggle to name the forms taken by consumerist desire and develop strategies for its transformation. On the level of the individual practitioner these strategies sound like traditional Buddhist meditation: mindfully observe the phenomena of the desiring mind, and, through attention, give rise to the insight that dissolves fixations and releases grasping. But “liberation theology” implies (as Simmer-Brown, Kaza, Santikaro, and others say overtly) a collective praxis for social as well as psychospiritual change. Kaza remarks that, historically, religions have been cultural sites for the discussion of ultimate and collectively resonant questions, reproducers of ideology but also, potentially, revolutionary transformers as well. The “inner work” of overcoming greed in the mind must be paired with an “outer work” of social change. The suggestion of these Buddhist writers collectively seems to be that Buddhism and the other world religions, rooted as they are in the precapitalist past, might have central roles to play in this necessary revolution toward a post-consumerist and therefore ecologically sustainable mode of human life.

The essays in *Subverting Greed* take up this suggestion. Seven scholars of religion who have thought deeply about the role of religions in a world of globalized capitalism offer responses to these questions: what do the religions (African traditional religion, Vedantic Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have to say about capitalism, and do they provide resources for social movements seeking to change the global economic order? Just as the writers in *Hooked!* agree that capitalist desire is a problem that needs to be included as a central concern for Buddhist practitioners, the scholars in *Subverting Greed* all operate with the assumption that the injustice, exploitation, and environmental devastation of the global economic system is a central problem requiring sustained attention by theologians and scholars of religion. The writers survey their respective traditions on the issues of economic ethics, generally concluding that, for every religion, the virtues of attention to the collective good rather than private profit, generosity rather than greed, communal long-term sustainability rather than immediate gratification of desires for pleasure especially on the part of the wealthy and powerful, are the winnowed wisdom of the traditions’ authoritative voices. The underlying question, raised by them all, however, is on the order of: how can we move from exhortatory religious admonitions (Don’t be greedy! Share with your brothers and sisters, especially the poorest! and so forth) to practical strategies of socioeconomic transformation?

In the absence of powerful social movements, religious wisdoms tend to sound like old saws preached to the converted. These essays are intended for classroom use in courses on religion and social ethics (questions for class discus-

sion are provided at the end of each chapter), and so one might respond to the challenge by asserting that education, the gradual raising of consciousness in the schooling of the young, is the answer, at least at the level of what scholars, separate from their possible other roles as activists (and some of these writers are also activists) can do. This cultural work of raising consciousness, in which the study of religions centrally includes a focus on the environmental and economic implications of their traditional teachings, is obviously vital, and *Subverting Greed* is an important, helpfully short, contribution to the literature available to teachers. The question does persistently arise, however, of why, if the religions are so unanimous in their teaching of nonmaterialist and thereby anticapitalist values, they have not as yet seemed to have offered any significant resistance to the globalization of capitalism. Of course, liberation theologies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia were significant forces in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and in some cases later as well. But in the twenty-first-century world of incipient eco-collapse in the midst of imperial war, terrorism, and continued economic exploitation of the poor by the rich, the emancipatory voices of the religions have seemed to be drowned out by the voices of worldly forces on the one hand and the global spread of religious fundamentalisms on the other.

Subverting Greed presents the religions as important resources for a communal, compassionate, and just global ethico-economic pattern of life. Its writers are skilled interpreters who know their traditions well and are clear and well informed about the realities of the contemporary world situation. These are the religious spokespeople that the socially engaged Buddhists of *Hooked!* (David Loy is the one writer who appears in both texts) must seek out in dialogue if the Buddhist liberation theology they are interested in developing is to have dialogue partners in the wider realm of world religions. But if the writers of both of these collections wish to substantiate the cry of the World Social Forum that “another world is possible” in resistance to the practices of greed that ravage the planet, then the question of social and political praxis must be addressed, responsive to the Leninist question, “What is to be done?”

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BUDDHISMS AND DECONSTRUCTIONS. *Edited by Jin Y. Park, with an afterword by Robert Magliola.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006. Pp. xxii + 290.

Buddhisms and Deconstructions originated in a panel on “Buddhism, Deconstruction, and the Works of Robert Magliola” at the twenty-second annual con-